



A Discourse Analysis Study of the Coverage of War in Syria Between Al-Jazeera English and BBC World

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Abstract

Although the news media are regarded as a means of communicating reality and truth, they are thought to be founded on such principles as "upholding democracy," seeking and stating the truth, doing no harm, promoting peace, opposing discrimination, serving the public interest, and so on, but most news media professionals do not observe these principles, and this is why news sites exist. Today, the vast majority of news media, or perhaps all of them, are dominated by influential groups, such as politicians, marketers, and those who support them. Sometimes, their own staff members influence them too. By employing critical discourse analysis techniques, the current research intends to bridge the existing gap between the East and West media by finding the key differences between the word choices of the BBC and Al-Jazeera and the way the chosen media channels convey messages in news. However, media linguistics was found to be a subfield of linguistics that focuses on the media. The linguistic study of media speech is called media linguistics. It investigates the role of language in the media field, or the contemporary mass communication that is delivered by print, video, and network media.

Keywords: Text, Discourse analysis, Socio-cognitive approach, Ideology, power, Political discourse analysis

دراسة في تحليل الخطاب لتغطية الحرب في سوريا بين قناة الجزيرة الإنجليزية وبي بي سي العالمية

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الملخص

على الرغم من أن وسائل الإعلام الاخبارية تُعد وسيلة لنقل الواقع والحقيقة، ويُعتقد أنها تقوم على مبادئ مثل "الحفاظ على الديمقراطية"، والسعي وراء الحقيقة ونقلها، والحد من الضرر، وتعزيز السلام، ومناهضة التمييز، وخدمة المصلحة العامة، وما الى ذلك، إلا أن معظم الصحفيين لا يلتزمون بهذه المبادئ، وهذا هو سبب وجود مواقع الأخبار الإلكترونية. في هذه الأيام، تخضع غالبية وسائل الإعلام، إن لم تكن جميعها، لسيطرة جماعات نافذة، بما في ذلك السياسيون والمسوقون والأفراد أو المنظمات الداعمة لهم. وفي بعض الحالات، يكون لموظفيها أنفسهم تأثيرٌ أيضاً. تسعى هذه الدراسة، من خلال توظيف تقنيات تحليل الخطاب النقدي، إلى سد الفجوة بين وسائل الإعلام الشرقية والغربية، وذلك بتوضيح الفروق الرئيسية بين اختيار الكلمات في كلٍ من



بي بي سي والجزيرة، والطرق التي تنقل بها كل قناة رسائلها عبر الاخبار. وقد نشأ علم لسانيات الإعلام كفرع من فروع علم اللغة يُركز على دراسة الإعلام. ويُعرف علم دراسة الخطاب الإعلامي بعلم لغويات الإعلام. يبحث هذا البحث في كيفية عمل اللغة في المجال الإعلامي، أو في وسائل الاتصال الجماهيري المعاصرة التي توفرها وسائل الإعلام المطبوعة والمرئية والشبكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النص، تحليل الخطاب، المنهج الاجتماعي- المعرفي، الأيديولوجيا، السلطة، تحليل الخطاب السياسي

1. Introduction

For linguists, media language has become a crucial component of significance. This curiosity is motivated by four pragmatic and moral considerations. The media provide a readily accessible source of linguistic data and are a vital part of institutions of language, reflecting and influencing language use and attitudes in a speech community. For many people, the language of everyday media use is inextricably bound up with their working lives, while for second language learners, it is often their only or primary experience of native speaker language. Linguistically, media language is a fascinating area, reflecting the use of different dialects and languages in advertisements, the echo of perceived reader speech in tabloid newspapers, and the deliberate use of language by radio personalities to create identities and build relationships with invisible audiences. In addition, the media are of great social significance, reflecting their complex role in influencing language and communication. However, in order to alter the news's context or the course of events in favor of channel orientations, the majority of news channels often have a tendency to invent words.

The goal of this research is to demonstrate the key distinctions between BBC and Al-Jazeera's word use and the ways in which the chosen channels express messages via news .

It is suggested that the usage of certain lexical elements might help close the gap between the news from the two channels. Additionally, the two channels used in this experiment have different lexical choices.

3. The Text

The news in this research is considered a text in the discourse analysis language. The term "text" often refers to any written or spoken section, regardless of length, that does constitute a cohesive whole (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 1) .



According to Widdowson (2007: 4), a sentence is an abstract unit of linguistic analysis, but a text is a real usage of language.

As Widdowson states, “A text is the language produced by the addresser—the first-person party in communication” (ibid: 133). A text is the “linguistic trail” that is left by the first-person party’s intended discourse, whether it is written or spoken.

3. Discourse analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the investigation of the complex and often hidden relationships between discursive practices, events, and texts. The application of a CDA approach will be used in this study to analyze news coverage. At 135 (Fairclough, 1995). According to CDA, language is never neutral, at least not on a personal level; it always conveys certain conclusions about the outside world (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). This implies that, as with ideological labor, it is always interpretive and explanatory. Similarly, Van Dijk (1998) views the critical approach to discourse analysis as a discipline that (i) examines and analyzes written and spoken texts to uncover the discursive sources of power, inequality, dominance, and bias (ii) and investigates how these discursive sources are perpetuated and preserved within a particular social, political, economic, religious, and historical context (McClure, 2008: 80).

The main objective of Critical Discourse Analysis is to highlight the linguistic and discursive aspects of social and cultural issues, as well as the processes of change that are typical of late modernity. Pedagogy, mass communication and racism, nationalism and identity, mass communication and economy (Richardson 1998), the spread of market practices (Fairclough 1993), and mass communication, democracy and politics (Jorgensen and Philips, 2002:61) are just a few of the topics that have been the subject of critical discourse analysis research.

Since they served as the foundation for CDA, Habermas's writings, Marxist critical theory, and particularly Foucault's theories have all been included in its purview (Hart, 2010:3). The primary influences on contemporary CDA, and especially that of Fairclough (1979), have been identified as Marxism and Foucault's power-related research; both Fairclough's CDA and contemporary CDA use a



combination of Marxists' critical view of society and Foucault's theories of power and discourse (Foucault, 1970:51–56).

4. Van Dijk's Approach

This term paper's methodology falls within the Dijk's approach or model in CDA. One influential individual in CDA, particularly in relation to media discourse, is Teun Van A. Dijk (1979). His method is known as the "Socio-cognitive approach" because it is distinguished from others by its use of cognitive analysis. The phrases "social" and "cognition" are combined to form "socio-cognitive." The word "cognition" refers to a group of processes that include perception, representation, and thinking. This linguist believes that speech and society are mediated by socio-cognition (Van Dijk, 1995:64). According to his theory, "managing the mind of others is essentially a function of text and talk" (Van Dijk, 1993: 254). Moreover, Van Dijk (1995: 7) argues that social power is a control device for thought as well as behavior. According to Van Dijk, discourse analysis is virtually equivalent to ideology analysis, as all modes of communication, including non-verbal communication, are essentially ideological. Van Dijk's analytical model is a two-level model. The micro-level involves such things as text, while the macro-level involves more general social structures. These two levels are linked by social cognition, which acts as a mediator between the two (Van Dijk, 1993: 280). The following image provides the clearest diagrammatic representation of the socio-cognitive approach:

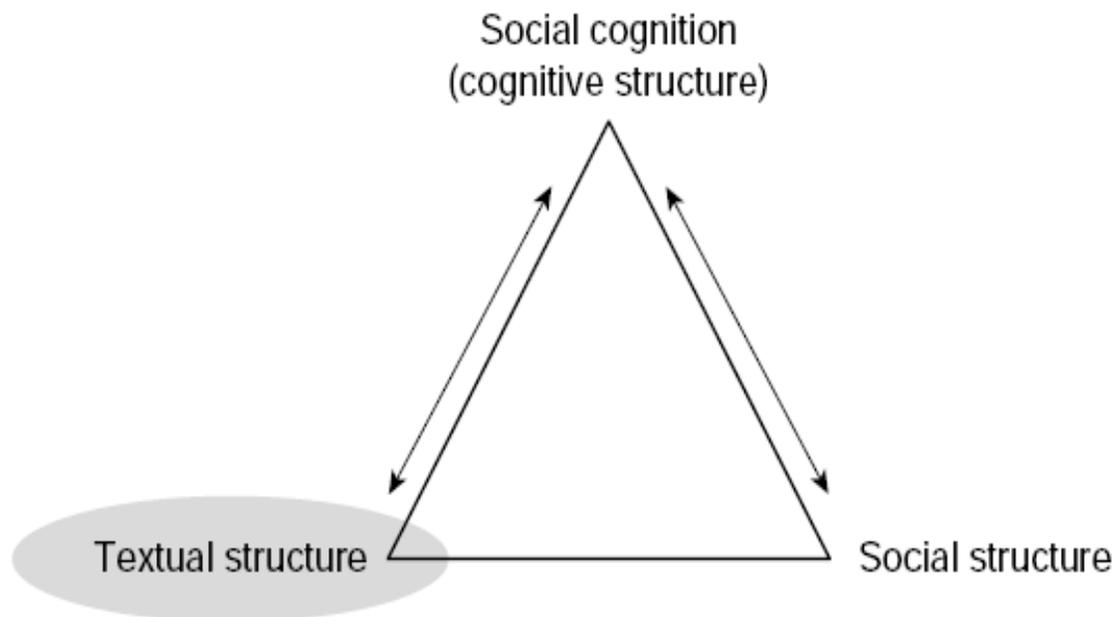


Figure (2.1) : Van Dijk's Textual-Cognitive-Social Triangle
Adopted from (Hart, 2010:15)

Van Dijk (1995) cited in (Bukhari and Xiaoyang, 2013:12) states that in order to "make transparent such as ideological dichotomy in discourse", the analysis must be in the following way:

- a. Looking at the context of the discourse, be it the historical, political, or social context of the conflict and its protagonists.
- b. Looking at the groups involved, as well as the power struggles.
- c. Looking at the positive and negative opinions expressed in relation to the "Us" vs. "Them" opposition.
- d. Looking at what is presupposed in the discourse.
- e. Looking at the formal structural elements of the discourse.

5. Wodak's Approach

Another key scholar in CDA is Ruth Wodak, who, along with her team in Vienna, has developed the Discourse-Historical Approach. This approach has been influenced by the socio-philosophical and ethnographic traditions and focuses on the



diachronic and synchronic development of discourse. Research on a range of societal issues, including racism, sexism, identity concerns, and anti-Semitism, has been conducted using this methodology (Hyland & Paltridge, 2011: 43). One of the fundamental ideas of this approach is that language is a social behavior. In its study, this method concentrates on the historical background of speech (Wodak et al., 1990:204).

According to Wodak and Ludwing (1999:12), CDA implies three main points:

- i. All discourses are affected by the presence of ideologies and power relations.
- ii. Furthermore, discourse is necessarily historical—a tenet that corresponds well with Fairclough's idea of "intertextuality." In discussing the differences between the methods of Wodak and Fairclough, KhosraviNik (2010: 84) states that Fairclough's data sources are necessarily "more limited in scope" than those of Wodak, since Fairclough's work is largely based on the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, while Wodak's work is informed by both sociolinguistic and ethnographic traditions.
- iii. In addition, the same discourse may have more than one interpretation based on the listener or reader. As Wodak and Ludwig (1999) have argued, "the right interpretation does not exist," and therefore a hermeneutic approach is required. Interpretations can be more or less likely or adequate, but they cannot be said to be true in any absolute way.

Another important aspect of this approach is its socio-philosophical basis, which requires the application of "a complex concept of social critique" involving three different aspects (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 64-65). These are:

"Text or discourse immanent critique"

- a. "Socio-diagnostic critique"
- b. "Prognostic critique"

In any kind of investigation, according to (Wodak and Meyer, 2001:65), seeks to do the following:



First, combining as much as possible amount of available knowledge related to the event of discursive practice, social, political and historical.

Second, researching the transformations that are taking place, diachronically, with regard to a specific discourse genre, in order to elucidate "the historical dimension of discursive practice".

Third, explaining the context through the integration of social theories.

6. Ideology

As long as ideology is a fundamental component of both the Van Dijk model and CDA in general. Therefore, this subsection is worth explaining. The French philosopher Destutt de Tracy is credited with coining the word ideology in 1796. Since then, this word has drawn the attention of several experts from various fields. They provided a variety of definitions that "vary in focus" but highlight comparable "concerns"; in other words, they approached it from several angles (Alaghbary et al., 2015:2).

From a Marxist perspective, ideology is understood as the study of ideas and beliefs (Richardson, 2007: 134). Eagleton (1991: 30) similarly defines ideology as signifying "ideas and beliefs," while also noting that it serves to legitimize the objectives of a ruling class or group through dissimulation and distortion. He further emphasizes that ideology "retains an emphasis on false and deceptive beliefs."

In response to the recognition that ideology is intrinsically linked to language—and that language itself serves as the habitat of ideologies—various analytical frameworks, including Critical Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), have emerged to investigate this relationship (Alaghbary, 2015: 6). Within critical discourse studies, ideology is generally conceptualized in one of three ways: (i) as a natural system of ideas and beliefs, (ii) as a distortion of reality accompanied by erroneous beliefs and values, or (iii) as a combination of both (ibid.). Van Dijk (1998: 1) further elaborates that, within CDA approaches, ideology encompasses not only ideas and beliefs but also values and attitudes.

Ideology also functions as a representation of formed connections, identifications, and particular values—often symbolizing the dichotomy between "Them" and "Us." Fairclough (2003: 28) contends that ideologies are images of elements within the



world that contribute to the establishment and perpetuation of power, dominance, and exploitative relations. Moreover, he notes that ideologies can be embedded in ways of being (shaping identities and styles) and enacted in ways of communicating (influencing genres).

Text analysis is an important aspect of ideological criticism and analysis. In this regard, he further argues that the process of identifying ideologies in any text is "partly" a question of "intertextuality" and involves the aspect of "thematization" analysis (ibid). Ideology is the analysis of social identity formations. People's views and ideas are shaped by their ideology. "When most people in a society think alike about certain issues, or even forget that there are alternatives to the present states of affairs, we reach the idea of hegemony" (Parsa, 2008 :62).

This shows that ideology has a very serious effect that should not be ignored, as it leads to hegemony. Richardson (2006:6) places ideology in media studies by highlighting some of the key aims and functions of journalism, and hence, news portals. The main aim of the media is to inform readers about the world and the events that are taking place. In the process, the media acts as a very effective means of disseminating beliefs and ideologies around the world.

On this point, the current research aims to demonstrate that this is not always the case, especially when it comes to issues pertaining to Islam; that is, journalism does not always accurately portray reality; rather, it uses discursive techniques to accomplish so. The way the media portrays incidents involving Islam and Muslims is negatively influenced by ideology. The practice of using some phrases instead of others, styling some voices differently than others, and picking specific events to report out of a wide range of occurrences are all examples that highlight how the media may accomplish the exact opposite of what it is meant to achieve. Ideology is one aspect of the battle for power and a means of exerting it, as stated by Fairclough (1992: 67), who claims that "discourse as an ideological practice constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relation." Power is served by it.

7.Power

This study work attempts to clarify the function of language and how power influences the word choice amongst news channels, since the use of power is one of the key ideas in the area of CDA because CDA analyses the language usage of people in power, social dominance, or the misuse of power by one group over another, and



the discursive methods by which these abuses are depicted in the discourse (Wodak, 2008:9).

Van Dijk (1993: 254) identifies two main domains in which different forms of power are exercised to control others, and these domains are: (i) the domain of action, in which power is exercised through money and force, as in the case of rich people and those who use force, respectively; and (ii) the domain of cognition, in which power is exercised through knowledge, information, and authority, as in the case of parents, academics, journalists, and the media. The type that CDA uses is the second one. According to Van Dijk, it uses more intelligent techniques of dissimulation, persuasion, manipulation, and naturalization, and hence is more crafty and complex than the first type. It transforms for the betterment of the individual.

Wodak (2008:9) states that power can be viewed in

- "power as a result of specific resources of individual actors (related to French and Raven, 1959)"
 - "power as a specific attribute of social exchange in each interaction (related to Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962, 1975)" and
 - "power as a systemic and constitutive element/characteristic of society (related to from very different angles, Foucault, 1975 and Giddens, 1984)".
- The third approach to power is how CDA views power. There are two major reasons for this. The first reason is that Foucault is one of the "godfathers" of CDA. The second reason is that the text for CDA is influenced by society.

8. Cohesive Categories and Political Texts

This subject examines the nexus between linguistic discourse and political language. Political discourse analysis is a multidisciplinary field of study. It investigates the link between language and power in linguistics, sociology, interpersonal relations, culture, and cognition. Moreover, Stayrk (2016: 8) argues that the following features of political speeches can be readily listed: First of all, the propensity to map political speech covers a wide range of fields and may be described by several research using a range of methodologies and concentrating on distinct fundamental factors. However, it must be noted that several of these research and methodologies have little to no connection to any theory of language. For example, content analysis is a kind of analysis that is often used in political science, media studies, sociology, and social psychology. Its goal is to find



and measure topics in an attempt to test hypotheses. Therefore, it is not interested in linguistic theory, but rather in pragmatics and the patterns that are typical of political discourse.

One of the characteristics of political discourse is the expression of levels of authority. This can be investigated in two different ways: the investigation of power in conversation and the investigation of power behind discourse. The first is concerned with the expression of power in discourse, as illustrated in cross-cultural encounters between speakers of different socioeconomic and ethnic origins.

9. Data Selection

This study intends to investigate the coverage of the Syrian conflict on English-language news channels, with a focus on BBC and Al-Jazeera English. The criteria for selecting the data are listed below:

1. Selection of news samples from BBC.
2. Selection of news samples from Al-Jazeera English.
3. Selection of texts that report the conflict in Syria as covered by both news channels.

10. The Model

This research will benefit from the model proposed by Van Dijk, as it provides a strong methodological approach to the discourse analysis of the chosen texts. The data will be analyzed at the second level of analysis, as proposed by Fairclough, which views the text in relation to power, ideology, and social events. The results will be presented in a thematic manner, as proposed by Fairclough's idea of thematization.

11. Text Analysis

1. Islamic State: Abu Muhammad al-Adnani 'killed in Aleppo'

The headline, with the past tense verb "killed," is taken from a 2017 report by the BBC. The headline reports that Al-Adnani was killed in Aleppo, Syria. The choice of the verb "killed" indicates that the channel's reporting of his death is the result of a series of military operations, and also that the dead person is considered to be an



enemy combatant. Conversely, IS-linked news outlets announced that Al-Adnani, who is the group's most senior strategist, was killed in Syria. This is because he had previously urged his followers to attack the West, especially during the month of Ramadan, and the calls led to massive violence. The Pentagon has confirmed that Al-Adnani was struck down in an airstrike in the vicinity of the town of Al Bab. This comes at a time when IS has been experiencing a series of military losses in both Syria and Iraq. On the other hand, Amaq, a news agency affiliated with the group, reported that Al-Adnani, the group's spokesperson, was "martyred while surveying operations to repel military campaigns against Aleppo," without giving any more information on the matter. During this time, the fighting in Aleppo had escalated, with Russian and Syrian jets bombarding rebel-held zones, although rebels were able to break a government siege.

2. ISIL's Abu Mohamed al-Adnani 'dead in Syria's Aleppo'

The word "dead" is used as an adjective. This data was gathered from an Al-Jazeera news report in 2017, where the reporter says that AL-Adnani is dead in Aleppo, Syria. The use of the word "dead" in this news organization differs from the terminology used in other news organizations, as it is a normal event rather than the direct result of military action.

Abu Mohamed al-Adnani, the chief spokesperson of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), was killed in the Syrian province of Aleppo, according to a website that is affiliated with the ISIL. Amaq, the ISIL-affiliated propaganda website, reported on Tuesday that Adnani was killed while closely monitoring military operations in Aleppo. In the meantime, a US defense official has confirmed that the coalition forces fighting against ISIL carried out an airstrike on Tuesday targeting a "senior leader" of the group, but the official did not reveal the leader's identity.

3. Syria war: IS 'kills 35' government troops in desert attacks

The word "kills" is used as the present tense verb in this case. This news article, taken from the BBC in 2018, reports that ISIS has killed 35 government soldiers in their



recent attacks in the desert. The use of the word "kills" by the BBC gives the impression that this is an ongoing process that has an effect on human life, but does not put as much importance on military engagement. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ISIS militants have killed 35 Syrian pro-government forces in a series of desert attacks.

4. 18 killed in huge blast in northwest Syria

In this case, the word "killed" is a verb in the past tense. This news headline, taken from Al-Jazeera in 2018, states that a significant number of people lost their lives in an explosion. The verb "killed" indicates that the incident occurred as a result of military activities, in addition to the fact that the victims are considered enemies by the speaker. Al-Jazeera uses this vocabulary to state that a significant explosion in Syria's rebel-held northwest on Wednesday resulted in the deaths of 18 people, most of whom were civilians, while others were still trapped under the rubble.

5. Air raid on Raqqa 'killed 1,600 civilians'

The word "raid" is a noun and represents an attack on a particular location, usually involving soldiers, planes, or ships, which is meant to be of short duration and cause minimal damage. This is why raids are usually connected with military operations conducted by the opposing side. The BBC uses this word to describe less serious incidents that take place in a particular area, possibly presenting the incident in a more objective or less aggressive way. By doing this, the channel shows the point of view of the coalition taking part in the conflict. Since 2014, when IS fighters occupied a vast territory in Syria and Iraq, the coalition of forces, including the US, UK, and France, has conducted about 34,000 strikes in both countries.

6. Strikes on Raqqa 'killed 1,600 civilians'

The word "strike" will be used in this case to describe a military attack that is usually carried out by aircraft during bombing missions. In this context, air strikes are used to describe attacks on cities, troops, or supply lines using aircraft to launch rockets or bombs. One such example of air strikes occurred in 2017 when activists documented that more than 1,600 civilians were killed in US-led coalition air and artillery strikes to drive the Islamic State group out of the Syrian city of Raqqa.



Amnesty International, working with the monitoring group Airwars, said they had identified 200 strike sites and named 1,000 victims.

7. Syria war: Kosovo brings back 110 citizens including jihadists.

The word "war" is defined as a time of conflict in which two rival groups wage military attacks on a particular area or country. The BBC has used this word to refer to the civil war that is taking place in Syria. In a report by the BBC, the group that repatriated from Syria consisted of four men, 32 women, and 74 children who were arrested upon arrival for suspected involvement with the Islamic State group (IS). On Saturday, Kosovo's Justice Minister, Abelard Tahiri, said: "The government of Kosovo, with the help of the US, has brought back 110 of its citizens from Syria in an important and sensitive operation."

8. Kosovo foreign fighters: 110 citizens repatriated from Syria

The word "fighters" is used in plural form in the headline of an article from Al-Jazeera, published in 2019. The journalist states that a "fighter" is a person who is associated with the ISIS military group operating in Syria. The use of the word "fighters" also indicates that the speaker considers the people who have died as enemies. Unlike the BBC, Al-Jazeera uses the word "fighters" instead of "terrorists" to refer to such people. On the other hand, the issue of what to do with women and children who lived in Syria under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) is still being discussed among a number of European countries. However, the government of Kosovo has already started the repatriation of more than 100 of its citizens from the conflict area.

12. Conclusions

In political media discourse, gender stereotypes are frequently studied using the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is a useful conceptual framework for such research. One of the core concerns of CDA is the role of language in the reproduction of ideology, which matches the concern of language and gender in media discourse, a field of study that is guided by a variety of theoretical approaches. It should be noted, however, that CDA has been criticized for its reliance on a few texts in the analysis, which may not be representative of the data and may be subject to researcher bias in text selection.



However, the assumptions made in this study have been proven true throughout the research process, especially in light of the diversity of the data selected in terms of the way messages are delivered to their audiences. For instance, there have been observed similarities in the usage of words between both Eastern and Western media. Researchers in the CDA tradition aim to shed light on the way social and linguistic practices intersect, especially in terms of the way language use both constitutes and maintains power relations in society. As mentioned earlier, CDA differentiates itself from other forms of discourse analysis in that it specifically tackles issues such as power inequality, abuse, manipulation, and systemic injustice in areas that include, but are not limited to, education.

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